



NATIONAL HEAD START ASSOCIATION

Early Head Start: An Evidence-Based Home Visitation Approach

Introduction

In his Fiscal Year 2010 budget proposal, President Barack Obama proposed \$8.5 billion over ten years for a home visitation program. This new mandatory spending program would provide funds to states for evidence-based home visitation programs serving children and their low-income families. Under the major home visitation legislation currently being considered by federal lawmakers, qualifying states can provide these funds to programs, such as Early Head Start, that clearly follow an evidence-based model of home visitation and demonstrate favorable impacts on child and family outcomes. Early Head Start programs provided home-based services to nearly 50,000 children and their low-income families during the 2007-2008 program year.¹ Some Early Head Start programs, such as the Guilford Child Development program in Greensboro, North Carolina, already follow a Brookings Institution recommendation to integrate the Nurse Family Partnership model with the Early Head Start model.²

Evidence

Early Head Start Impact Study researchers employed a national, random assignment experimental design to evaluate Early Head Start programs. These researchers evaluated Early Head Start programs which followed three service delivery approaches: 1) center-based, 2) a combination of center-based and home-based, and 3) home-based. Of these approaches, the largest and most numerous impacts on child and family outcomes were found for the approach offering a combination of center-based and home-based services and implementing the Head Start Program Performance Standards earliest.³

Regarding programs exclusively providing home-based services, researchers evaluated programs which used a home-based Early Head Start approach as of 1997. These home-based programs followed the Head Start Program Performance Standards and provided all of their services to families through weekly home visits and at least two group socializations per month for each family.⁴ The researchers found that home-based Early Head Start programs provide numerous favorable child and family outcomes:

- Children in Early Head Start had higher levels of engagement with their parent during semi-structured play than the control group children did.⁵
- Parents in Early Head Start programs were rated as more supportive of their child during semi-structured play than the control group parents were.⁶
- In comparison to control group parents, Early Head Start parents demonstrated greater reductions in stress, participated a higher number of hours each week in an education or training program, and were more likely to participate in education and training activities.⁷

1651 Prince Street, Alexandria, VA 22314
Tel: (703) 739-0875 - Fax: (703) 739-0878 - www.nhsa.org

The National Head Start Association, an independent membership organization, advocates on behalf of the entire Head Start community and provides training and resources to Head Start programs nationwide.

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2008). Head Start Program Information Report for the 2007-2008 Program Year. National Level Summary Report for Early Head Start Programs.

² Roberson, K. (2009). Guildford Child Development: Head Start and Early Head Start. PowerPoint presentation at the September 2009 National Head Start Association Leadership Institute; Isaacs, J. (2007, January). *Cost-Effective Investments in Children*. Brookings Institution Briefing Paper.

³ Love, J. et al. (2005). The Effectiveness of Early Head Start for 3-Year-old Children and Their Families: Lessons for Policy and Programs. *Developmental Psychology*, 41(6): 885-901.

⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2004, January). *Making a Difference in the Lives of Infants and Toddlers and Their Families: The Impacts of Early Head Start*. Volume I: Final Technical Report.

⁵ Love, J. et al. (2005). The Effectiveness of Early Head Start for 3-Year-old Children and Their Families: Lessons for Policy and Programs.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2004, January). *Making a Difference in the Lives of Infants and Toddlers and Their Families: The Impacts of Early Head Start*.